DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 269 502 UD 024 837

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TITLE	Evaluation of Project ALERT (Atlantans Learning Employment Responsibilities Together). Summer Youth Employment Program 1985.
INSTITUTION	Atlanta Public Schools, GA. Div. of Research, Evaluation, and Data Processing.
PUB DATE	85
NOTE	16p.; For a related document, see ED 238 918.
AVAILABLE FROM	Atlanta Public Schools, 210 Public Pryor Street, S.W., Atlanta, GA 30335.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Career Education; Career Planning; *Economically Disadvantaged; Education Work Relationship; High Schools; *Job Training; Minority Groups; *Summer Programs; Urban Youth; *Work Experience Programs; *Youth Employment
IDENTIFIERS	*Atlanta Public Schools GA; *Project ALERT

ABSTRACT

Project ALERT was conducted by the Atlanta Public School system for the third consecutive year during the summer of 1985. An education for employment component of the Summer Youth Employment Program, Project ALERT represents a concentrated effort to address problems that have contributed to the high unemployment rate among economically disadvantaged youth. The primary goal of the project is to increase the future employability potential of the participants by increasing their reading and mathematics competencies, helping them clarify their careers, and providing employment experiences. Participants were assigned to various public and private nonprofit organizations for a total of 16 hours of work experience per week. Additionally, each participant was enrolled in educational activities, which focused on computation, communication, and job finding career skills, for 18 hours per week. In 1985, Project ALERT served 167 students, 157 of whom earned between 7.5 and 22.5 hours of credit by earning a passing grade in from 1 to 3 of their academic subjects. After the program ended, over 60 percent of the participants felt that they possessed those behaviors necessary for employment, and 87 percent attained an improved awareness of career objectives. Because gains were seen in all areas except computation, in the future additional opportunities should be provided for practical application of computation skills. (KH)

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EVALUATION OF PROJECT ALERT
(ATLANTANS LEARNING EMPLOYMENT RESPONSIBILITIES TOGETHER)
SUMMER YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM
1985

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EVALUATION OF PROJECT ALERT (ATLANTANS LEARNING EMPLOYMENT RESPONSIBILITIES TOGETHER) SUMMER YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

1985

INTRODUCTION

Project ALERT was conducted by the Atlanta Public School System (APS) for the third consecutive year during the summer of 1985. An education for employment component of the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), Project ALERT represents a concentrated effort to address problems that have contributed to the high unemployment rate among economically disadvantaged youth. Though the economy is on the upswing, the rate of unemployment for minority youth continues to be greater than that of majority youth.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This project was developed and initiated by APS in conjunction with the Atlanta Private Industry Council, Incorporated. Funded under the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), Project ALERT was designed to provide service to heighten the employability level of 170 rising ninth and tenth graders 14 to 16 years of age. Participants were involved in Project ALERT from June 17 — August 16, 1985.

The participants in this project were economically disadvantaged applicants having a normal curve equivalent (NCE) total battery score on the California Achievement Tests (CAT) of 40 or less.* Each participant was selected and referred through the SYEP referral process. All participants were residents of the City of Atlanta who were enrolled in APS during the 1984-85 academic year, and had taken the CAT. Prior to enrollment, each participant had to indicate a willingness to participate in Project ALERT.

Participants were assigned to various public and private nonprofit organizations for a total of sixteen (16) hours per week. The 16 hours of work experience were to provide meaningful, well supervised opportunities for expansion and/or development of employability skills. In addition to the 16 hours of work each participant was enrolled in educational activities for eighteen (18) hours per week. These educational activities focused upon computation, communication, and job finding/career skills. For the 16 hours of work, participants were paid at the rate of $3.50 per hour. Additionally, at the conclusion of the program, each participant received a lump sum payment at the rate of $.50 per hour for each hour worked. No monies were paid to the recipients for the 18 hours per week spent in educational activities. Those participants successfully completing the program received 22.5 hours of academic credit.

Program Objectives

The primary goal of this project is to increase the future employability potential of the participants by increasing their reading and mathematics competencies, helping them clarify their career goals, and providing employment experiences.

*Note: An NCE of 50 indicates performance on grade level.

Project ALERT officially began on June 3, 1985. The first few days of the program were used for staff orientation and preplanning. Curriculum areas of concentration were established and operational procedures reviewed by the staff members. Additionally, staff members received CAT data to be used in insuring that participants were placed in the correct gross grouping. Each student was placed based upon his/her assessed achievement test score.

Students enrolled in Project ALERT reported at 8:00 a.m. on Monday, June 17, 1985. The first portion of the day one was spent in orientation activities. Following the orientation and assignment to homerooms, students cycled through their class schedule and were dismissed at 11:30 a.m. to report to their job sites. Instructional activities were designed to address student academic abilities although the overall objectives for all students were the same.

Project ALERT participants were involved in the school setting, Monday through Friday, from 8:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., with one-half hour for lunch. Career-oriented activities and field trips were scheduled to take place during the period when participants were in the educational setting. Students reported to their work sites Monday through Friday in order to put in the required 16 hours of work activity per week.

Each Project ALERT participant was administered the Project ALERT pretest during the initial days of the program, and the Project ALERT Posttest one week prior to the program's end. The Project ALERT tests were parallel forms of an instrument developed, based upon the APS areas of student difficulty as revealed by the Fall '84 Georgia Basic Skills Tests (GBST). In addition, the Project ALERT tests included some career items assigned to assess participant knowledges of the relationship between education and careers, job market knowledge, attitudes, and cognizance of the need for long-range planning.

FINDINGS

Data Analysis

The data that were gathered on the Project ALERT participants were analyzed in order to delineate any changes in participants' competency levels and attitudes. Differences beween participants' pretest and posttest scores were examined by comparing the mean scores obtained by the same participants on the pretest and posttest. This statistical procedure was selected to provide answers for the following questions.

1. Did Project ALERT have a significant impact upon students?
   a. What was the degree of improvement in communication skills?
   b. What was the degree of improvement in computation skills?
   c. What was the degree of improvement in career knowledge?
2. Did the participants' understanding of the relationship between education/training and the world of work improve as a result of Project ALERT?
3. Did the participants report having the employment attitudes necessary for success?

Specific objectives are:

1. To increase the communicative competency level of 170 youths by providing focused intensive instruction in functional reading and language skills.

2. To increase the numerical competency levels of 170 youths by providing focused intensive instruction in mathematical operations and problem solving.

3. To increase 170 youths' understanding of the relationship between education and the world of work.

4. To assist 170 youths in clarifying their career goals through Program of Education and Career Exploration (PECE) activities.

5. To increase 170 youths' awareness of job families related to their first and second future employment choices through PECE activities.

6. To increase 170 youths' understanding of their obligations as employees by requiring punctuality and attendance at a minimum of 90 percent of all planned program activities.

7. To increase the job finding skills of 170 participants through career-planning activities.

8. To increase the job retention skills of 170 participants through career-planning activities.

Performance Standards

1. A minimum of 75 percent of the program participants will demonstrate improved academic performance by showing favorable growth in basic skill competencies as a result of their participation in Project ALERT. The criterion-referenced pretest and posttest developed by the APS Research Division will measure changes in competency levels (computational and communicative).

2. A minimum of 80 percent of the participants will demonstrate an improved awareness of 90 percent of the career knowledge measured through the counselor administered pre and post program assessment.

3. A minimum of 90 percent of the participants will meet attendance requirements.

4. Ninety-five percent of the APS participants completing the project will receive 22.5 hours of academic credit.

5. Dropouts will not exceed 10 percent of total enrollment.

6. All funded slots for youth workers will be filled by June 10, 1985.

7. Slot vacancies will be filled within two (2) working days of notification of termination.

8. No slot vacancies will be filled after July 5, 1985.

Additionally, the data were examined to determine whether the performance standards (see preceding section) were successfully achieved.

Results

An analysis of the pretest-posttest gains exhibited by the program participants was performed for each of the three instructional groups of programmatics emphasis. Gains shown in the areas of communications, computation, and career knowledges were analyzed using a correlated t test.

TABLE 1

PRETEST-POSTTEST COMPARISON OF PARTICIPANTS' GAIN IN COMMUNICATION (N=144)

Category	Mean	Standard Deviation
Pretest	10.9	2.6
Posttest	11.6	3.8

p = .024

The communications subtest focused on three of the reading and language arts objectives which were problematic for APS students on the Fall '84 GBST. As shown in Table 1, the participants mean posttest score was .70 units greater than their pre-test score. This difference though not of great magnitude indicates that participants gained additional communication skills. Further, the probability score (p=.024) indicates that the mean posttest score is not due to change.

Table 2 shows the mean gains attained by the participants on the three objectives which comprised the communications subtest.

TABLE 2

PRETEST-POSTTEST COMPARISON OF PARTICIPANTS' GAIN ON EACH COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVE (N=144)

Category	Objective	Mean	Standard Deviation
Pretest	1	4.1	2.8
Posttest (p=.019)		3.5	1.7
Pretest	2	2.8	2.6
Posttest (p=.000)		4.3	1.6
Pretest	3	4.5	2.0
Posttest (p=.001)		3.8	1.7

As can be seen in Table 2, participants demonstrated a positive gain on Objective 2, while showing a significant loss on Objectives 1 and 3. The probability scores derived for each objective tend to indicate that the change in mean scores for each objective is not due to chance.

Comparison of the computation subtest scores reveal that the participants demonstrated a .74 unit loss in their mean score between the pretest and posttest. (See Table 3.)

TABLE 3

PRETEST-POSTTEST COMPARISON OF PARTICIPANTS' GAIN IN COMPUTATION (N=144)

Category	Mean	Standard Deviation
Pretest	8.28	4.9
Posttest	7.54	2.3

p = .052

The change in computation score though approaching the point where it might be accepted with confidence is shown by its probability score (p=.052), as not being significant.

TABLE 4

PRETEST-POSTTEST COMPARISONS OF PARTICIPANTS' GAINS ON THE COMPUTATION OBJECTIVES (N=144)

Category	Objective	Mean	Standard Deviation
Pretest	1	4.74	1.45
Posttest (p=.000)		3.93	1.42
Pretest	2	1.72	1.85
Posttest (p=.245)		1.59	1.14
Pretest	3	1.76	1.74
Posttest (p=.051)		2.02	.82

As can be seen in Table 4, participants demonstrated a gain on only one of the three objectives which comprised the computation subtest. The probability scores which indicate the likelihood that participants would attain the same score on a retest indicate that only the scores obtained on computation objective 1 are significant and, therefore, likely to indicate a true difference.

Examination of the career pretest-posttest results indicate a small improvement in participants' career knowledges. This .23 unit improvement is not significant and is, therefore, most probably the result of chance (p=.349). (See Table 5.)

TABLE 5

PRETEST-POSTTEST COMPARISON OF PARTICIPANTS' GAIN IN CAREER KNOWLEDGE (N=144)

Category	Mean	Standard Deviation
Pretest	12.19	5.73
Posttest	12.42	4.54

(p = .349)

Table 6 reveals positive gains on Career subtest objectives 1 and 2 only. The probability scores tend to indicate that the scores attained for career subtest objectives 2 and 3 were the only objectives whose scores were not due to chance. The gains on the four career subtest objectives ranged from -.70 to .67. (See Table 6.)

TABLE 6

PRETEST-POSTTEST COMPARISONS OF PARTICIPANTS' GAINS ON THE CAREER OBJECTIVES
(N=144)

Category	Objective	Mean	Standard Deviation
Pretest	1	2.43	1.91
Posttest (p=.282)		2.54	1.31
Pretest	2	3.63	1.51
Posttest (p=.000)		4.30	1.60
Pretest	3	4.03	2.90
Posttest (p=.007)		3.33	1.79
Pretest	4	2.31	2.59
Posttest (p=.410)		2.25	1.42

Objective 1 of the Career subtest assessed the participants' understanding between education/training and the world of work. As can be seen in Table 6, there was improvement in the participants' understanding as reflected by a .11 unit increase in the mean score. The probability score, however, (p=.282) indicates that this small chance is probably due to chance rather than a true increase in understanding. Objective 2, however, which assessed the participants' awareness of the job market reflect a significant change (p=.000). This .67 unit improvement indicates that there was an actual increase in the participants' knowledge of the job market.

Table 7 provides a summary of the results of a survey designed to obtain a measure of the employment related attitudes of participants.

TABLE 7

PARTICIPANTS' EMPLOYMENT PERCEPTIONS

Employment Attitude	Percent of Participants
Ability to take supervisor's criticism	63
Ability to get along with coworkers	93
Punctuality	27
Ability to follow directions	97
Ability to find and hold a job	95
Vocational awareness	82

As shown in Table 7, 63 percent or more of the participants perceived themselves to be behaving in a manner appropriate for job success in all areas assessed except one. The one area in which only 27 percent of the participants perceived themselves as exhibiting the desired trait was punctuality. The highest percentages of participants indicated they could follow directions (97 percent) and find and hold a job (95 percent). It is apparent that in designing future programs, greater attention should be given to assisting participants in respect to punctuality.

TABLE 8

AVERAGE PARTICIPANT ATTENDANCE
(N=167)

Number of Weeks	Percent of Attendance	Relation to Standard
9	92.4	+2.4%

Attendance records were maintained on all participants enrolled in Project ALERT. A review of these records shows that 92.4 percent of the participants achieved the attendance goal. (See Table 8.)

Project ALERT, during the summer of 1985, never achieved its goal of 170 enrollees. The project began and ended with 167 participants.

TABLE 9

ASSESSMENT OF PARTICIPANTS
COMPLETING PROGRAM
(N=167)

Number of Enrollees Completing Program	Credit Hours Earned	Percentage
111	22.5	66.5
28	15	16.7
18	7.5	10.8
10	0	5.9

Of the 167 students completing Project ALERT, 157 received academic credit. (See Table 9.) Credit awarded ranged from 7.5 to 22.5 hours. As shown in Table 10, 94 percent of the participants received academic credit for participation in Project ALERT.

TABLE 10

PARTICPANTS' ACADEMIC EARNINGS

Number of Enrollees Completing Program	Mean Hours Earned	Percent Receiving Credit
167	11.25	94

The mean number of hours received by persons completing Project ALERT was 11.25. Ten participants received no credit, eighteen participants received 7.5 hours of credit, and twenty-eight received 15 hours of credit.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Project ALERT provided an opportunity for 167 economically disadvantaged Atlantans between the ages of 14 and 16 to gain viable employment experience. In addition, it afforded each participant the opportunity to acquire those communicative, computation and career awareness skills necessary for gainful employment while earning academic credit. One hundred fifty seven of the 167 participants earned between 7.5 and 22.5 hours of credit by earning a passing grade in from 1 to 3 of their academic subjects. Only 111 of the participants took full advantage of the opportunity afforded them by earning 22.5 hours credit. Better than 60 percent of the participants indicated that they possessed those behaviors necessary for employment.

Each of the eight performance standards with the exception of number four (4) was achieved.

A total of 94 percent of the participants showed favorable academic growth by earning at least 7.5 hours of academic credit. Yet, only 66.5 percent (see Table 9) of the participants earned 22.5 hours of academic credit, therefore, failing to achieve performance standard four (4).

Performance standard one (1) was exceeded by 24 percent. Eighty-seven percent of the participants showed through their posttest performance that they had an improved awareness of the career objectives. These individuals demonstrated improvement by bettering their performance on from 80 to 100 percent of the career subtest items, thereby achieving performance standard two (2). As shown in Table 8, 92.4 percent of the participants met the attendance standard, and as a result exceeded performance standard three (3).

There were no persons who were identified as dropping out of this program. All funded slots were filled by June 10, 1985, and any vacancies occurring between June 10 and July 5, 1985, were filled within 48 hours of notification of a termination. No slots were filled after July 5, 1985. The facts cited in the preceding portion of the paragraph indicate achievement of performance standard five (5) through eight (8).

Though only 87.5 percent of the performance standards (i.e. 7 out of 8) were achieved, the participants made significant improvement in their communication subtest scores. Gains were also evidenced in the area of career knowledges but not to a significant degree. There was evidenced a decline in computation scores from the pre to the posttest.

In future programs of this type, it is suggested that the adherence to program guidelines as evidenced during the summer of 1985 be continued. Additional opportunities for practical application of computation skills should be provided in order to encourage participant retention of skills. Based on the assessment of outcomes, the Project ALERT for 1985 must be judged as positively impacting the majority of enrollees in respect to employment attitudes and academic performance.

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September 26, 1985

APPENDIX

1985 ALERT COMPETENCIES AND OBJECTIVES

Competency	Objective	Definition
Communication	1	The student recognizes appropriate reference sources.
	2	The student interprets figurative language.
	3	The student makes generalizations and draws conclusions.
Computation	1	The student orders fractions, decimals, or percents.
	2	The student solves simple word problems.
	3	The student organizes data into tables, charts, and graphs.
Career	1	The student recognizes the relationship between education and careers.
	2	The student demonstrates job market knowledge.
	3	The student shows an awareness of the appropriate job attitude.
	4	The student recognizes the need for long range planning in decision making.